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United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session (A/72/279), provides information on the activities of the Fund and describes in particular the recommendations for grants adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its forty-sixth session, held in Geneva from 30 October to 3 November 2017.

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I. Introduction

A. Submission of the report

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/146, complements the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (A/72/278). It contains updated information on the activities of the Fund, in particular the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its forty-sixth session, held in Geneva from 30 October to 3 November 2017.

B. Mandate of the Fund

2. The Fund receives voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals. In accordance with the mandate of the Fund outlined in General Assembly resolution 36/151 and the practices established by the Board of Trustees since 1982, the Fund provides grants to established channels of assistance, in particular NGOs, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms that submit project proposals aimed at the provision of medical, psychological, social, financial, legal, humanitarian or other forms of direct assistance to victims of torture and members of their families.

C. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

3. The Secretary-General administers the Fund through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the advice of a Board of Trustees composed of five members acting in their personal capacity and appointed by the Secretary-General with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and in consultation with their Governments. On 26 September 2017, the Secretary-General appointed Sara Hossain (Bangladesh), Lawrence Murugu Mute (Kenya) and Vivienne Nathanson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) to replace Anastasia Pinto (India) and Maria Cristina Nunes de Mendonça (Portugal), whose mandates ended on 21 October 2017, and Morad el-Shazly (Egypt), who had resigned earlier in the year. The mandates of Mikołaj Pietrzak (Poland) and the Chair of the Board, Gaby Oré Aguilar (Peru), were renewed.

II. Management of grants

A. Admissibility criteria

4. Project admissibility criteria are outlined in the guidelines of the Fund. The guidelines require a project proposal to be presented by an established channel of assistance, in particular NGOs, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms. The beneficiaries must be victims of torture and/or their family members. Priority is given to projects providing direct assistance to torture victims, which may consist of medical or psychological assistance, help with social or financial reintegration as well as various forms of legal assistance for victims or members of their families, including support in seeking redress or applying for asylum. As a general rule, projects are supported on a yearly basis for a maximum of 10 years, subject to a satisfactory evaluation of the project and availability of funds.

5. Depending on the availability of funds, the Fund also supports projects seeking to organize training or capacity-building activities for health-care personnel or other service providers, with priority given to applicant organizations that have already received a grant from the Fund. These projects may take the form of training sessions, including peer-to-

peer training, workshops, seminars and conferences or staff exchanges. They are to be conducted primarily for the benefit of the professional staff of the organization applying for support. Grant applications for projects involving investigation, research, studies, publications or other similar activities are not admissible.

6. Outside of the regular grants cycle and subject to availability of funds, the Fund also considers applications for emergency assistance under the emergency intersessional procedure, outlined in the guidelines for the Fund. Emergency grants may be awarded in exceptional circumstances, such as a sudden increase in the number of victims of torture to be assisted as a result of a humanitarian crisis, including armed conflict, war or natural disaster. Emergency grants may also be awarded to enable organizations to resume their activities when such crises result in grave situations (e.g., destruction of their premises or offices) that make it impossible for them to continue providing assistance.

B. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

7. As a rule, pre-screening visits to the applicant organizations are undertaken before a grant is awarded for a new project proposal. Regular visits to monitor ongoing projects for which the renewed support of the Fund is being sought are also conducted to assess the implementation and impact of the projects funded. Internal guidelines on conducting visits to assess projects that have been or are to be funded were developed by the secretariat of the Fund to ensure a consistent evaluation process. Visits to undertake technical evaluations of 68 projects were carried out in 2017, including by the secretariat of the Fund, OHCHR field presences and members of the Board.

III. Financial situation of the Fund

8. The Board, in close coordination with the secretariat of the Fund and the Donor and External Relations Section of OHCHR, seeks to secure a more satisfactory level of contributions from donors, which is needed to respond to the current realities of victims of torture and their family members worldwide. A minimum yearly income of $12 million would be necessary to respond adequately to the requests for assistance received by the Fund from rehabilitation centres and redress programmes worldwide. In the past three years, the Fund has managed to secure an average yearly income of $9 million.

9. The table below shows the contributions and pledges received in 2017 (as of 10 December). At the forty-sixth session of the Board, at which grants were recommended for projects to be implemented in 2018, the Fund had a net total of $8,360,690 available for its 2018 activities, including the award of grants.

Contributions and pledges received from 1 January to 10 December 2017

Donor	*Amount (United States dollars)*	*Date of receipt*
Contributions and pledges		
Austria	16 797	12 June 2017
Canada	43 989	19 April 2017
Chile	5 000	15 March 2017
Czechia	9 164	15 September 2017
Denmark	428 877	24 February 2017
France	21 231	25 April 2017
Germany	447 928	28 June 2017
Germany	202 133	8 December 2017
India	25 000	26 January 2017
Ireland	91 799	11 April 2017

Donor	*Amount (United States dollars)*	*Date of receipt*
Italy	32 017	28 March 2017
Italy	11 848	10 December 2017
Kuwait	10 000	1 April 2017
Liechtenstein	25 100	9 May 2017
Luxembourg	16 688	24 October 2017
Norway	100 876	4 August 2017
Peru	1 482	23 March 2017
Saudi Arabia	75 000	26 May 2017
South Africa	5 536	30 March 2017
Sri Lanka	5 000	19 January 2017
Switzerland	203 252	8 December 2017
United States of America	6 550 000	24 October 2017
Total contributions and pledges	**8 336 936**	

IV. Forty-sixth session of the Board of Trustees

10. The forty-sixth session of the Board was held in Geneva from 30 October to 3 November 2017. The Board examined applications for funding and made recommendations on grants to be awarded to beneficiary organizations for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018.

11. The amount available for distribution to projects was calculated after deducting programme support costs, the operating cash reserve and the expected expenditure for non-grant activities from the total amount of contributions received since the forty-fourth session of the Board, held in October 2016.

12. At the forty-sixth session, the Board reviewed a total of 218 admissible project proposals aimed at providing direct assistance to victims of torture and their families and — to a lesser extent — training and capacity-building in the field of rehabilitation. Applicants requested a total of $13,987,691.

13. In line with the grant-making procedure set out at its forty-fifth session (see A/72/278, paras. 5–8), the Board recommended awards for a total of 166 projects in 78 countries. The awards for the recommended projects totalled $7,221,000, for an average of $44,000 each. Of the 166 projects, 159 are for the delivery of direct assistance to victims of torture and 7 are for strengthening the capacity of the beneficiary organizations to deliver such services. With the vital financial assistance of the Fund, nearly 40,000 victims and their families worldwide should have access to rehabilitation in the course of 2018.

14. Project proposals were reviewed on a competitive basis, taking into account the merit and documented needs of each proposal, the degree to which it complemented other initiatives and the number of years of continuous support by the Fund to the same project.

15. The Board also recommended setting aside an additional $300,000 to respond to emergency assistance requests that may be received in 2018 through the intersessional procedure of the Fund.

16. In 2017, thanks to its enhanced emergency procedure, the Fund was able to provide financial support in the amount of $156,500 for the immediate relief of victims of torture. Grants under the emergency procedure were awarded to support vital rehabilitation services in Argentina, France, Hungary, Italy and the Russian Federation.

17. At its forty-sixth session, the Board also recommended that the secretariat undertake a mapping exercise of grant-making entities that feature prominently in the funding landscape for direct assistance to victims of torture, to be presented at the Board's next policy session, in April 2018. That exercise would make it possible to identify comparative

advantages and complementary priorities, thereby ensuring that the Fund is clearly positioned.

18. In addition, the Board, pursuant to a recommendation made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2009, recommended that in 2018 the secretariat produce an updated albeit non-exhaustive compilation of guidance on what practices constitute torture. The aim of the compilation is to help applicants for grants from the Fund understand its mandate more clearly.

19. The Board also held a videoconference with representatives of civil society organizations meeting in Copenhagen within the framework of an initiative to draft a supplement to the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol). The new supplement will contain updated information, clarification and guidance on the implementation of the Istanbul Protocol by States and civil society organizations.

20. Furthermore, the Board also met with the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The meeting focused on the need to strategically integrate the Fund in the OHCHR Management Plan 2018–2021.

21. In line with its policy on making the Fund a platform for knowledge-sharing in the field of rehabilitation and redress for victims, the Board agreed to the organization of a fourth thematic expert workshop, on access to justice for victims of torture, at its forty-seventh session, to be held in April 2018. As in previous editions, the workshop will gather selected experts and practitioners from organizations that have been awarded grants by the Fund and representatives of United Nations treaty bodies, special procedure mechanisms and United Nations agencies. The proceedings of the previous expert workshop, on torture in the context of migration, are summarized in the report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of the forty-fifth session of the Board (see A/72/278, paras. 9–13).

V. Making a contribution

22. Governments, NGOs and other public and private entities are encouraged to contribute to the Fund. It is important to note that only specifically earmarked contributions are attributed to the Fund. For more information on how to contribute and details about the Fund, donors are requested to contact the secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; email: unvfvt@ohchr.org; telephone: +41 22 917 9376; fax: +41 22 917 9017.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

23. **The contexts and crises in which torture takes place have become more complex in recent years, resulting in an increasing number of victims, including children and adolescents, indigenous people and minorities, human rights defenders, political opponents and journalists, migrants, people with disabilities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. The need for redress and rehabilitation is pressing.**

24. **The Board continues to refine the working methods of the Fund to ensure that the resources available are fairly distributed. The Board, convinced that progress towards the full eradication of torture requires a strengthened United Nations anti-torture front, also seeks to work in close coordination with the other mechanisms set up by the United Nations to combat torture.**

25. **Many States continue to neglect their obligation to prevent torture and fail to provide torture victims with effective and prompt redress, compensation and appropriate forms of rehabilitation. The Fund has been a lifeline of last resort for thousands of unattended victims worldwide.**

26. **The Board holds the view that there is a need to facilitate knowledge-sharing among rehabilitation practitioners and that the Fund should serve as a platform for exchanging and collecting expertise in this field by holding annual thematic workshops. The next such workshop, which will focus on access to justice for torture victims, will be held in Geneva in April 2018.**

27. **The Secretary-General appeals to Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to the Fund, noting that even small contributions are a concrete manifestation of the commitment of States to the elimination of torture, in line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 14 in particular. The Fund would need an annual income of $12 million (as opposed to its current annual income of slightly more than $8 million) to respond adequately to the numerous requests for assistance it receives.**